

Character Assassination

Chaucer: *The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*

Framework for developing detailed notes on each portrait

Translation	This needs to be your own translation, not a rip-off from a published modern translation. The point is that by engaging with the language yourself you will become familiar enough with Middle English to be able to read it and/or quote from it in the exam. And, besides, it's interesting!
Character and characterisation techniques	Summarise briefly what we learn about this character. Identify key lines and useful quotations. Note what characterisation techniques are used, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Description of physical appearance, clothing and accessories▪ Description of character's actions and mannerisms▪ Character's speech (direct or indirect) and speech style▪ Character's relationships with other characters▪ Narrator's explicit/implicit comment on character▪ Use of symbols or recurring patterns of imagery
Themes and issues, attitudes and values	Identify the ideas explored through our consideration of each character, e.g. corruption, hypocrisy, virtue, moral value, the role of the church, appearance versus reality, social status ... Consider what attitude Chaucer appears to have to each theme – note that the view of the fictionalised "Chaucer" narrator may very well be different.
Narrator's tone and/or direct comment	Note what tone or mood the narrator brings to the character's description, e.g. angry, bemused, comic, caring, formal, gentle, impressed, ironic, outspoken, reticent, satirical, serious ...
Who/what is before/after? Links? Shifts?	Although Chaucer was largely writing for a literate audience, his works would frequently be read aloud amongst groups of friends/courtiers, drawing on the oral tradition of literature. Think about how Chaucer sustains his listening audience's interest through the way he links one portrait to the next, e.g. through shifts of pace, tone and focus, links between characters, similarity and difference ...
Connections with other characters? Comparisons? Contrasts?	Take a wider focus here, and identify similarities and differences across <i>The General Prologue</i> . Connections between characters' strengths or their weaknesses? Connections of tone? Thematic connections? Connections of poetic technique?
Poetic technique	What do you notice about the language used? Look carefully and comment on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Diction and imagery▪ Rhythm and metre▪ Aural impact, striking rhymes and phonological devices▪ Use of irony, humour and rhetoric▪ The structure of the portrait
Your response	Make sure you complete this section, as most of your marks will come from having clear personal opinions about your reading. Don't be afraid to respond honestly as freshness of response is valued far more highly than the ability to regurgitate James Winny's old notes.